

Donald Gordon and Gordon Point on Palomar Mountain

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Information and photograph sources in this biography are cited except for ancestry.com, familysearch.org, and findagrave.com; therefore, an uncited fact or photograph came from those sources. Property records were not researched.



Gordon Point on the 1971 U.S.G.S Boucher Hill map

Webber is misspelled and should be Weber

Gordon Point makes its first appearance on the 1971 U.S.G.S. map for Boucher Hill and is named after Donald Hazen Gordon (July 22, 1883 – June 10, 1968) who lived nearby.

Robert Asher wrote [1]:

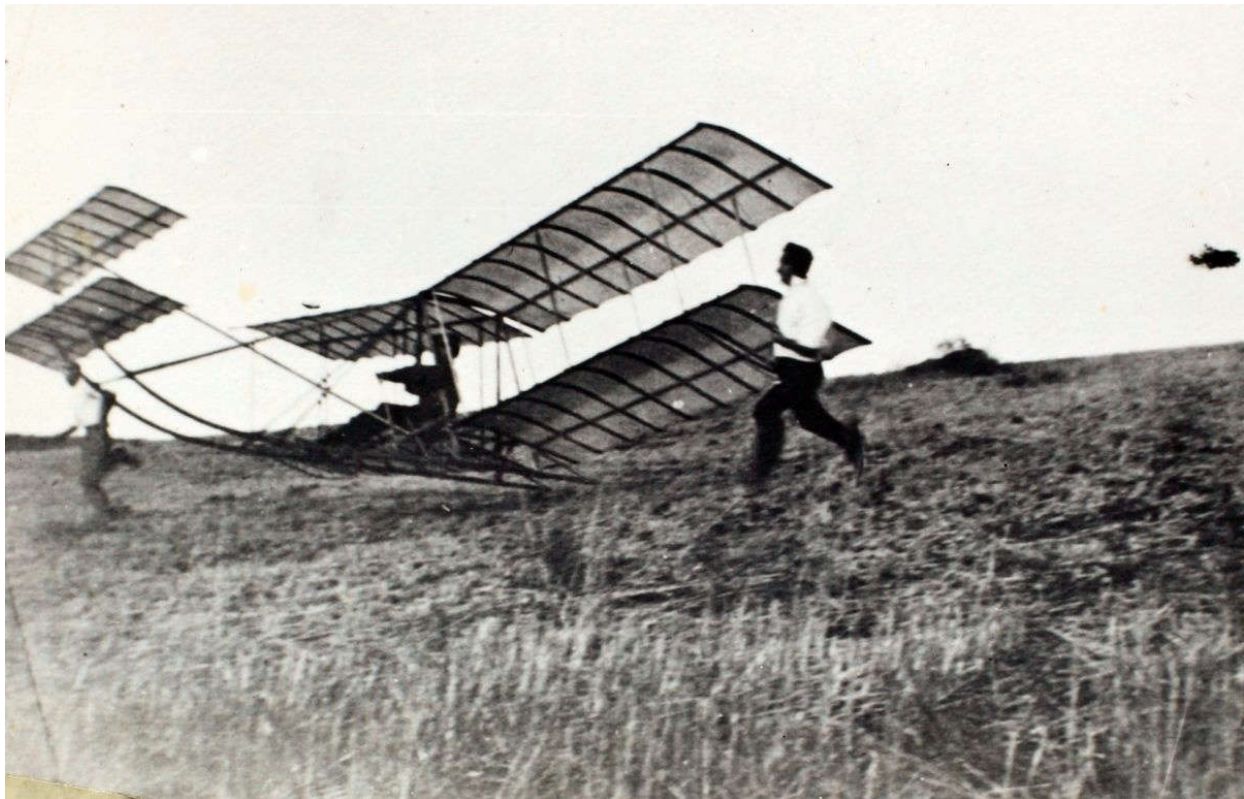
Just east of the (San Bernardino) Meridian there is quite a tract of nearly level and well-timbered land, and also a small peak. Most of this land is in the Richey place so named from the former owners. Don Gordon of El Cajon Valley bought this place some years ago. The view from Gordon Hill is very good, and I think Don plans to build a cabin one of these days. There have been no buildings on this tract that I know of. Don has been coming up to the mountain now and then for years, generally on his motorcycle. He is one of aviation's earliest pioneers and a boyhood friend of this writer, and of late years, a great friend of the Webers, ...



Donald Gordon, c1911 San Diego Air and Space Museum

The San Diego Air and Space Museum wrote [4]:

Born in New Britain, Connecticut in 1883, at three years old Donald H. Gordon moved with his mother, father, and three brothers to the Bostonia area of [El Cajon]. During his 20s, Gordon began studying the work of others and by 1908 he had completed his own glider. A true pioneer for the time, Gordon was able to sit in the plane and control it instead of hanging in it and shifting his weight to control direction. Gordon's aircraft was a biplane with a controllable front elevator, not dissimilar to the plane of the Wright brothers. The wings of Gordon's plane measured 28 feet, and the length of the plane measured 18 feet.



Gordon's glider, undated San Diego Air and Space Museum

In 1909, after the success of the glider, Gordon added a 2-cylinder Curtiss motorcycle engine to the aircraft. The plane, with the seven-horsepower engine and a three-wheel landing gear was light enough that Gordon could lift the entire machine himself. Though Gordon was able to get a few "hops" from his aircraft, he ultimately was unable to sustain flight. When the plane crashed, Gordon took the opportunity to obtain a 4-cylinder Curtiss engine which could nearly double his horsepower. Gordon's new biplane (a tractor) had a conventional tail, no front elevator, a two-wheel landing gear, ailerons, no dihedral, and his seat was in the rear.

San Diego Will Be Well Represented in Airship Events

Five Inventors of Aeroplanes Enter their Machines in Competition

San Diego will be brought prominently into the Los Angeles aviation week by the offer by the directors of the meet of a \$5000 cash prize to the first pilot of an aeroplane or dirigible who is able to fly from Los Angeles to this city and back again.

This offer is one of many made for special achievements with balloons, dirigibles and aeroplanes. It is likely to attract much attention and it is considered probable that a number of balloons may attempt the southward trip if weather conditions at the time are encouraging.

San Diego county has already furnished five entries for the Los Angeles events. These are as follows:

San Diego Aeroplane company, San Diego, monoplane.

Donald H. Gordon, Bostonia, biplane.

James H. Liston, Pacific Beach, monoplane.

B. F. Roehrig, 930 Tenth street, San Diego, monoplane.

Waldo D. Waterman, San Diego, biplane.

The engine has already been installed in the aeroplane of the San Diego Aeroplane company. The flying machine is now in a barn at Third and D streets, sheltered from the weather, ready for use. Clear weather is awaited, and a trial flight will then be made from the Coronado race-track.

The aeroplane of Donald Gordon, the young Bostonia rancher, is practically completed also. A Curtiss engine has been installed, and young Gordon expects to make a trial flight some day this week, possibly today. The inventor has already made glides with his machine before the engine was installed, going for a distance of several hundred feet from the impetus obtained by a push from a rail. Some little trouble was experienced in installing the motor, but Gordon now believes that his first flight will result in success.

James A. Liston, like Gordon, is a rancher who has devoted his spare hours to perfecting a flying machine, which he believes will be a reliable air vessel.

LOCAL AVIATORS HAVE USUAL TROUBLES

Repairs and Changes Necessi-
tated in Walsh and Gor-
ton Aeroplanes

POSTPONE TRIAL FLIGHTS

Waldo Waterman Will Install
New Motor; Cannot Enter
Aviation Events

The usual series of inventors' troubles are being experienced by the prospective aviators of San Diego and vicinity, who have aeroplanes completed or in the process of construction, to be entered in the events of Los Angeles' aviation week.

Yesterday morning C. F. Walsh of the San Diego Aeroplane company, was to have made a trial flight in his monoplane, said to be the largest in the world. A slight accident which occurred Wednesday prevented the trial, and the first flight probably will take place today.

Wednesday afternoon the inventor took his machine on a trial spin around the Coronado County club's racetrack, but did not attempt to leave the ground. It was to be simply a try-out for the steering apparatus, which worked to perfection. However, while coming down the home stretch under full sail, the wheels of the monoplane struck a chuck hole. As a result of the jar both the guy wire on the rear hub and the driving chain of the right propeller were broken.

Yesterday morning the broken parts were repaired, and it was also found necessary to unlumber the propellers and turn the driving shaft down a trifle. It is expected that these minor repairs will have been completed by today, when another trial is scheduled to take place. Walsh will use every effort to have his flying machine in trim to enter for the prizes offered by the promoters of Los Angeles' aviation week.

Waterman Has Trouble

Waldo Waterman, the high school student, who has a biplane practically completed, will be unable to enter the aviation week events on account of engine trouble. The motor installed was found, upon trial, to be of faulty construction. Young Waterman has by no means given up the idea of completing his machine, and putting it into working order, but he doubts his ability to secure and install the new engine in time to enter for the events of January 10 to 20.

Gordon Nearly Ready

Donald Gordon, the young Bostonia rancher, who has been experimenting in aeronautics for the last several months, states that he practically is ready to make a trial flight. He is unwilling, however, to make any statement as to the time set for this flight, as he desires that it be private.

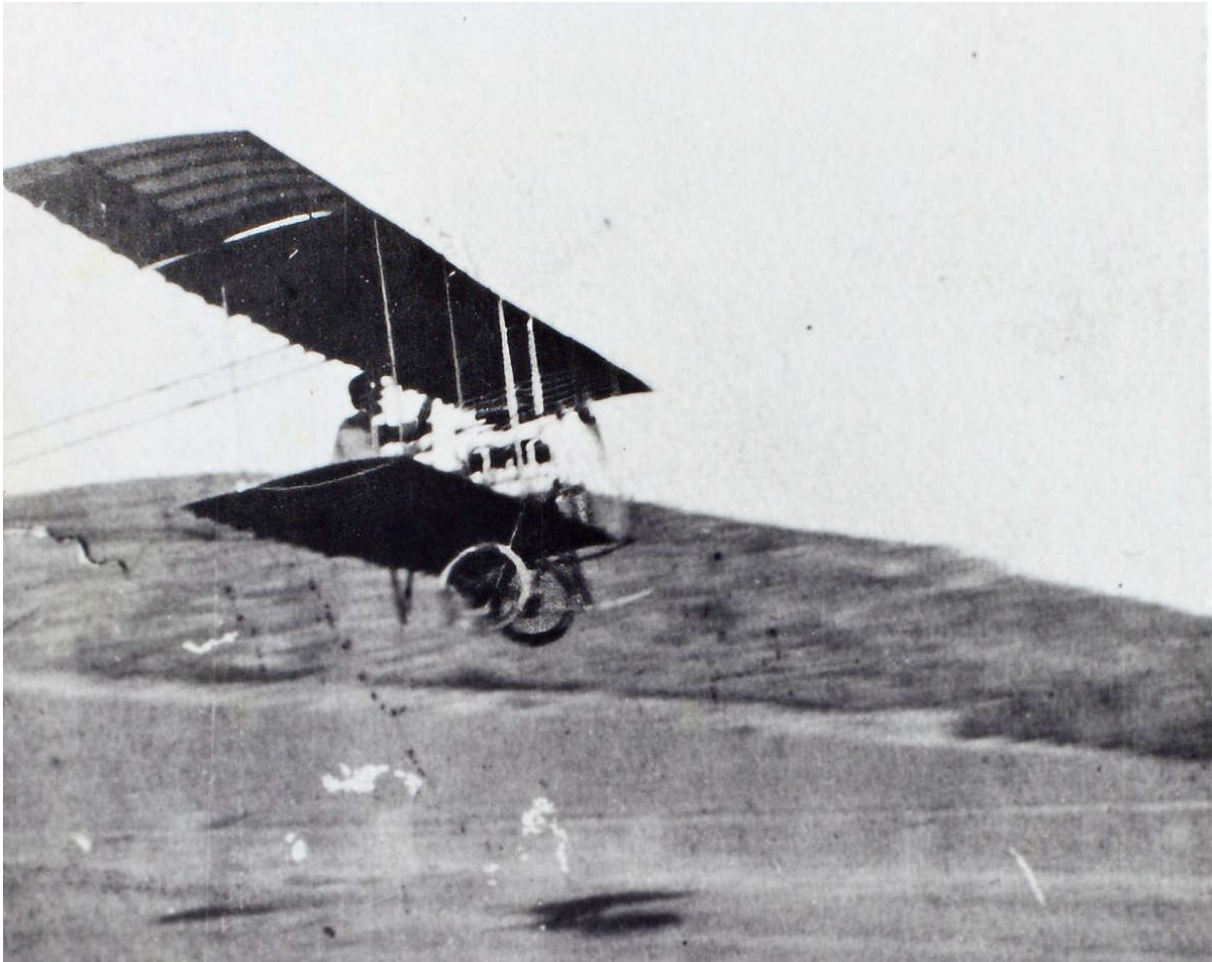
It is stated, not by Gordon, that a trial has already been made, but it was not altogether successful. The necessity for some changes was seen, and the young man has since been busy making alterations.

Using this plane, Gordon could fly all around his 40-acre field. In doing so, Donald Gordon became the first person west of the Mississippi River to successfully fly a powered aircraft.



Gordon's second powered aircraft, undated San Diego Air and Space Museum

Once WWI started, Gordon stopped working on planes and attempted to join the Air Service, but was rejected on account of his increasing deafness. After the war Gordon bought a Wright-engine, but never built a plane for it. ... Donald Gordon lived out the remainder of his life on 160 acres on Palomar Mountain.



Gordon's second powered aircraft, undated San Diego Air and Space Museum

The Valley Center Historical Society wrote [2]:

Donald H. Gordon, who built and flew four planes from 1908 to 1917. He began experimenting in Valley Center about 1920 on a little-known flying field that remains in its original undeveloped state along Cool Valley Road east of Cole Grade Road. Gordon, who grew up in the El Cajon Valley, built and flew a glider and three powered planes on the family's 160-acre ranch at Bostonia. His was one of the first power flights west of the Mississippi, and was made within six years of the Wright Brothers' first flight. Earlier, while the Wrights were making their first public flights in 1903, Gordon actually built a glider which took off from the top of the family barn. The contraption collapsed, and plane-building was suspended for several years.

Although he was nearly deaf by 1917, a condition which affected his balance, Gordon nonetheless resumed limited flying in the early Twenties at the Valley Center site... Long-time residents along the half-mile flying field on Cool Valley Road recalled hearing stories of the long-ago pioneer flights Some residents also mentioned a hangar and barn which once stood on the property. Gordon reportedly lived in the barn. ...

Historians say that Gordon did not become famous because he refused to hold public demonstrations as was common among early-day fliers. He moved to Palomar Mountain about 1944, lived in a converted water tower, and remained active on local conservation projects and clearing fire trails until his death in 1968 at age 84.



Donald Gordon's water tank residence on Palomar, undated San Diego Air and Space Museum

Doug Anderson wrote [3]:

Growing up at the Observatory, I knew a very interesting man, a former resident Donald Gordon. Mr. Gordon had 160 acres on what was known as Morgan Hill. He lived out west of the Upper French Valley on Palomar. Mr. Gordon built and flew the first airplane west of the Mississippi! We would ride our motor bikes over to see him on occasion. He lived in a water tank with a pump organ. He was always building something. One time over there he was laying out and hand making a chain sprocket to gear down a motorcycle. He had no electricity, he was using a hand crank drill press to drill the holes, then hand filing the teeth, unbelievable! He was stone deaf so we couldn't communicate very well. ...



Donald Gordon on his Palomar land, undated San Diego Air and Space Museum



Donald Gordon, undated Palomar Mountain News ^[3]



Findagrave ID 6640377

Donald Gordon is buried in Mount Hope Cemetery in San Diego.

References

- 1= My Palomar. Robert Haley Asher. archive.org/details/asher-my-palomar_202402
- 2= Vintage Air Field in Valley Center. Valley Center Historical Society. www.vchistory.org/historical-sites/aviation-pioneer-donald-gordon/
- 3= Donald Gordon, Aviation Pioneer. Palomar Mountain News, 2020. palomarmountainnews.com/2020/05/27/donald-gordon-aviation-pioneer/
- 4= Donald H. Gordon Special Collection. San Diego Air and Space Museum. sandiegoairandspace.org/collection/item/donald-h.-gordon-special-collection